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ABSTRACT

The expansion theory, which maintains that an individual has unlimited energy to expend in work or marital involvement, and the drain theory, which maintains that an individual's energy for work can be depleted by overcommitment to family, compete with each other in explaining the effect of worklife on the adult male's family relationships. To investigate the influence of work factors upon marital adjustment in blue collar males, 40 husbands from traditional families, with a mean age of 33 and a mean marital status of 10 years, participated in the Adult Identity Interview and completed the Marital Adjustment Test. The Dictionary of Occupational Titles was used to make quantitative complexity rankings of their jobs. An analysis of the results showed that, in support of the expansion theory, work complexity, intrinsic work strength, and income were relatively unimportant as independent variables compared to extrinsic work strength and age. Workers who reported extrinsic factors to be important in their work, such as high pay, job security, and pleasant working environment, also reported high marital adjustment. For those who perceived their work to be important for extrinsic reasons, the majority had favorable perceptions. However, the effect of extrinsic work commitment was mediated by age, which also was a positive predictor of marital adjustment. Younger workers were more committed to their work for extrinsic reasons than were older workers. (BL)

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Work Identity and Marital Adjustment in Blue-Collar Men

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of objective and subjective work factors upon marital adjustment in a sample of 40 male blue-collar workers. The drain and expansion theories of work and family commitments were contrasted. The objective work feature of job complexity did not independently predict marital adjustment. Commitment to work for extrinsic reasons, a subjective factor, significantly predicted marital adjustment in a positive direction. However, the effect of extrinsic work commitment was mediated by age, which also was a positive predictor of marital adjustment. Younger workers mentioned extrinsic work factors more frequently than did older workers. Thus, the expansion theory received support among this sample of blue-collar workers.

There are two competing theories to explain the effect of worklife on the adult male's marital relationship (Marks, 1977; Piotrowski, 1978). The "expansion" theory is based on the premise that the individual has a virtually unlimited supply of energy that can be expended into work or marital involvements. In contrast, according to the "drain" theory, the resources that can be devoted to work can be depleted by over-commitment to the family or vice versa.

In studies on white collar workers conducted by Scanzoni (1965), Willmott (1971), Pahl & Pahl (1971), Renshaw (1976), and Kanter (1977), it was observed that men experience emotional drain from the demands of their work organizations for travel, long hours and family relocation. Moreover, in white-collar marriages, the wife's needs are placed secondary to the needs of the corporation and her efforts are called upon to assist her husband's career. This situation results in conflicts between the wife and husband, which are assumed to be further depleting of his commitment toward his family. Support for the expansion energy theory was found by Willmott (1971) and Piotrowski (1977) in situations where the worker had freedom, responsibility and complexity in his work environment.

Among blue-collar workers, only the drain theory has received support. Kroes et al (1974), Mott (1964), Clark et al (1978), and Piotrowski (1978), found the demand placed upon the worker to be available during the evening and night hours (shift and police work) drained the worker's energy. Kroes et al (1974), Komarovsky (1962), and Rubin (1976), and Piotrowski (1978), found the routineness of work to be emotionally draining upon the husband, leaving him with little energy for interaction with his wife. In these studies, the blue-collar workers

who served as participants did not experience their work to be interesting nor did they have any degree of freedom or autonomy. It is possible that if blue-collar workers were studied who performed complex work tasks with some amount of autonomy, they would be found to experience expansion of their emotional energy as do white collar workers under these conditions. In the present study, blue-collar workers were selected according to two levels of complexity of their work tasks (with shift work controlled) to determine which group would be found to experience energy expansion or drain for their marital relationships.

Further, in none of the preceding studies was the worker's perception measured of the degree of importance of work in his life. All workers were placed into categories such as blue-collar workers or white-collar workers but how important a part of their life work was to them, whether manual labor or desk work, was not measured. Except in cases where job satisfaction was reported, no attempt was made to measure a worker's investment of energy in his job. In the present research, it was considered important to measure the worker's perception of the salience of work in his life in relation to the important areas of his total life involvements as an indicator of energy investment.

The worker's subjective evaluation was regarded as another influence on the effect of work commitment on marital interaction independently of the objective structural aspects of the work environment. What might be challenging and exciting work for one individual may very well be uninteresting for another. The subjective evaluation of job rewards in the work environment by the individual worker has been classified by Kelleberg (1977) into intrinsic and extrinsic

dimensions, a distinction similar to Herzburg's (1957) two factor theory of work motivation. Intrinsic rewards are associated with features of the work itself. The extent to which the worker perceives his work as interesting, is allowed to develop and use his abilities, is able to be self-directive and is able to experience the results of his work are seen as intrinsic factors of the work environment. Extrinsic factors experienced by the worker include the work setting itself, the exprit de corps among the workers, the amount of opportunity for advancement and recognition, and support for task performance in the work environment. Thus, the intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of the perception of the work environment were considered along with the objective features of the job in predicting the energy for the marital relationship that results from work engagement.

In studies such as those by Piotrowski (1978) and Willmott (1971), which supported the expansion theory, involvement in work produced more energy for important outside recreational interests, hobbies and civic/community involvement. According to the drain theory, involvement in activities beyond work and family could deplete the reservoir of energy for the marriage. Involvement in important outside interests was measured to determine the effects of commitment to work relative to other interests upon marital adjustment.

In research on marital adjustment, age was determined to be an important variable as well as level of income (e.g. Andrews and Withey, 1976). Older couples tend to be happier and families who are at a higher standard of living are found to have more marital adjustment than those couples who live on a lower income level. Therefore, both age and income were included as potential influences on marital adjustment.

In order to evaluate the relative contributions of work complexity, perceived importance of work, subjective evaluation of intrinsic and extrinsic work factors, involvement in outside interests and demographic characteristics to marital adjustment, the method of analysis consisted of stepwise multiple regression. According to the expansion theory, complex work would be expected to be associated with high marital adjustment because it would be energy producing. Energy would be depleted from complex work according to the drain theory. Work that is perceived as important would be expected to predict high marital adjustment according to the expansion theory, and low marital adjustment according to the drain theory. From the expansion theory it would be predicted that if work is perceived as either intrinsically interesting or extrinsically rewarding or both, the worker would have greater energy for his marriage. These conditions would be depleting of energy, according to the drain theory. A high degree of involvement in outside interests would be expected, according to expansion theory, to be related to high marital adjustment, and the converse according to drain theory. Age and income were expected to be positively related to marital adjustment.

Method

Sample

A sample of 40 husbands from "traditional" (i.e., male breadwinner) families were selected from the work force in the greater Rochester area. Lists of parents from three parochial schools, and two local industries in the Rochester area were used to obtain subjects as were referrals from friends and acquaintances. All subjects were asked for names of their friends who might participate. Twenty husbands were selected who performed simple tasks with things (e.g. assembly line)

and 20 whose work involved complex work with things (e.g. machinists). Their ages varied from 25 to 41 years (M=33.40, sd=4.74) and they had been married from 2 to 21 years (M=10.83, sd=4.89).

Measures

The Dictionary of Occupational Titles (1977) was used to provide a quantitative ranking of jobs in terms of complexity of work with things (D.O.T., 1977, p. SVIII). Occupations classified as high on things would include tasks such as setting-up, precision working, operating-controlling. Handling, feeding-off bearing and tending would be classified as low in their work orientation toward things.

The Adult Identity Interview developed by Whitbourne (1981), was used to measure perceived importance and subjective evaluation of work, and importance of outside interests. This is a 60-minute semi-structured protocol with questions designed to be asked until a criterion of a response that appears rateable is obtained for each question. As part of the interview, questions were asked concerning the importance of outside interests by the use of a circle which the respondents divided according to the importance of their various important areas of their lives. Questions were also asked to determine perception of intrinsic and extrinsic work factors as well as affect concerning those commitments. Tape recordings of these interviews were transcribed and rated by researcher-interviewers who had been previously trained. Two-judge agreement for this instrument is .80. The Marital Adjustment Test developed by Locke-Wallace (1959) was used to measure marital satisfaction.

Procedure

Respondents were contacted by phone and appointments were set up for an in-home interview that lasted about one hour. During the interview session the Adult Indentity Interview was administered, followed by the Marital Adjustment Test and questions concerning demographic information.

Results

In Table 1 are displayed the means and standard deviations on the main variables of interest in the study. Table 2 displays the intercorrelation of the seven variables used to test the predictive effects of work involvement on marital satisfaction.

Insert Table 1 and Table 2 about here

The results of the multiple regression analysis are shown in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Extrinsic Work Strength was found to explain a significant proportion of the variance of marital adjustment. This relationship was in a positive direction. Age also was found to explain a significant portion of the variance with marital adjustment and this relationship was in a positive direction. Importance of work and important outside interests accounted for variance in the final regression equation but only predicted one percent of the variance apiece and were not individually significant. Both of these relationships were in a negative direction.

Discussion

Investigation of work factors predicting marital adjustment in the present

study yielded the findings that work complexity, intrinsic work strength and income were relatively unimportant as independent variables compared to extrinsic work strength and age. Workers who reported extrinsic factors to be important in their work, such as high pay, job security and pleasant working environment also reported high marital adjustment. For those who perceived their work to be important for extrinsic reasons, the majority had favorable perceptions. These results support the expansion theory. Detracting somewhat from the support for the expansion theory was the negative contribution of work importance and involvement in outside activities to marital adjustment. However, these variables contributed only small amounts of the variance on marital adjustment in comparison to extrinsic work strength and age.

The effect of extrinsicality on marital adjustment was moderated by age. Age was a positive predictor of marital adjustment. The greater marital satisfaction of the older workers is consistent with findings reported elsewhere (e.g. Andrews and Withey, 1976). Age was also negatively correlated with extrinsic work strength. It would appear that younger workers were more committed to their work for extrinsic reasons than were older workers. Younger workers with children were striving to provide financially for their families. House payments, car payments, and other such obligations are a fact of life for blue-collar families regardless of age; however, with so many assembly-line workers receiving wages based on a union scale, their pay remains basically similar regardless of seniority. Thus, a young worker would have the same earning power as an older one. In turn, young workers tended to feel positively about their ability to provide for their families. As one worker stated, "I feel

quite fortunate, the way the economy is . . . and I feel that my present position is an achievement." Older workers may have been involved in work for extrinsic reasons because they seemed to have achieved a certain degree of financial success and were less pressured by family financial demands.

Contrary to expectation, objective features of the work environment did not predict marital adjustment. Instead, the subjective features of perception of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and dissatisfactions outweighed the effects of work complexity. In most research on the effects on the individual of occupational experience, either objective (e.g. Kohn and Schooler, 1973; 1978) or subjective (e.g. Herzberg, 1957) work factors are studied. By directly comparing the influence of the two in the present study, it was possible to show that it was the perception of the work tasks rather than work tasks themselves which influenced the worker's personal life outside work.

Reinforcing the importance of subjective factors were observations of how workers described their work environment during the interview process. They would often compare their work with other jobs that they perceived as less desirable which objectively were not that different from their own in terms of complexity (e.g. packing parts versus assembling parts). The basis for comparison was the rewards associated with different positions, such as status, autonomy, salary, and pressure. In addition, a type of cognitive dissonance reduction seemed to be involved as respondents in jobs with low complexity reviewed the positive and negative aspects of their work in comparison to other jobs. These workers, while making reference to their low level of education and their lack of skills, were

also at the same time quite proud of what they had been able to accomplish for their families through their work. The subjective evaluation of their marketable work skills and the amount of security and success they achieved in the market place seem to have been major factors in how workers evaluated their work characteristics.

For this sample of assembly-line and skilled mechanical workers it was necessary to obtain the majority of respondents from industries that pay sufficiently well so that the wife was not forced to work. Attempts to obtain respondents from lower paying companies were unsuccessful because of the need of these workers to have two incomes in the family. The present sample tends, therefore, to be skewed toward workers who received rather high financial compensation for their own work.

A number of researchers such as Rubin (1976) and Komarovsky (1962), have implied that the blue-collar worker is alienated both from his work and from his family. These studies seemed to have concentrated on workers who performed menial tasks for low pay. In the present study, younger blue-collar workers were committed to work for extrinsic reasons and experienced high marital adjustment. It is possible that a young person's self-worth and self-esteem could be substantially affected in a positive direction because of pay, job security, and retirement benefits. This positive feeling of being successful in one's work life in providing for one's family seems to be related to high marital adjustment. Similarly, if one's work is given low financial rewards and fringe benefits, it would seem to

be a cause of conflict reducing both the worker's own self-esteem and marital adjustment.

TABLE 1

List of Variables Used to Assess Work and Family Commitment, Satisfaction, and Demographic Characteristics of the Sample.

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age	33.40	4.79
D.O.T. Things	3.35	3.18
Important Outside Interests	253.78	140.36
Income	$19,474	$6,312
Marital Adjustment	121.40	12.90
Work Interview		
Intrinsic Work Strength	2.28	1.18
Extrinsic Work Strength	2.08	1.29
Work Importance	230.68	110.72

TABLE 2

Intercorrelations of Variables Used in the Regression Analyses

	D.O.T. Things	Extrinsic Work Strength	Importance of Work	Important Outside Interests	Income	Intrinsic Work Strength	Marital Adjustment
Age	-.04	-.30*	-.07	.01	.25	.17	.16
D.O.T. Things		.22	.11	.14	.40**	-.23	.04
Extrinsic Work Strength			-.05	.01	.16	-.25	.40**
Importance of Work				-.13	.40**	.14	-.08
Importance of Outside Interests					.12	-.27*	-.05
Income						.33**	-.06
Intrinsic Work Strength							.02

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

TABLE 3

Regression Table of Independent Variables on Marital Adjustment

Variable	R	R^2	R^2Change	Beta	F	
Extrinsic Work Strength	.40	.16	.16	.51	7.14	
						P < .01
Age	.49	.24	.08	.29	4.04	
						P < .05
Importance of Work	.50	.25	.008	-.10		
Important Outside Interests	.50	.25	.005	-.06		
				Total	2.98	
						P < .05

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